

THE FUNCTION OF VODOO IN RITA DOVE'S "PARSLEY" AND
YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA'S "BLUES CHANT HOODOO REVIVAL"

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of

The University of Dayton

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Will McClain Clemens

University of Dayton

Dayton, Ohio

April 1995

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ROESCH LIBRARY

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Brian Conniff
(Faculty Advisor)

Dr. James Boehnlein
(Faculty Reader)

ABSTRACT

THE FUNCTION OF VODOO IN RITA DOVE'S "PARSLEY" AND YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA'S "BLUES CHANT HOODOO REVIVAL"

Will McClain Clemens
The University of Dayton, 1995

Advisor: Dr. Brian Conniff

This paper will examine the thematic and formal influences of voodoo on the poetry of Rita Dove and Yusef Komunyakaa, two poets with strong ties to the Midwest, who have recently won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry (Dove in 1987 and Komunyakaa in 1994). In particular, Dove's often-anthologized "Parsley," and Komunyakaa's "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival," use voodoo images to justify the use of a syncretic literary method. Because voodoo is a conglomeration of African and European cultures, Komunyakaa and Dove see it as a fitting foundation on which they can build poems that integrate aesthetic principles and cultural material from both African American and European American sources. On the surface, these poems use images to vividly portray voodoo and its socio-history, but these images function as images of a contemporary multicultural. Thus, Dove and Komunyakaa stress the desire for African American poetry to be viewed both inside and outside the African American canon--which is, as Michael S. Harper and Anthony Walton argue, "often limited to those works that are identifiably 'black' [those works] with black subject matter, themes, etc" (3). Using multicultural images which draw on voodoo, Dove and Komunyakaa address both African Americans and European Americans. Yet, a close

reading of "Parsley" and "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival" suggests Dove's and Komunyakaa's slightly different perspectives on voodoo.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Brian Conniff for his promptings and suggestions, and for his support, time, and kindness; and to Dr. James Boehnlein for his sure handed editing, and valued advice.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Department of English at the University of Dayton for its guidance, encouragement, and general enthusiasm. In particular, I would like to thank professors Stephen Wilhoit, Herbert Martin, Katy Marre, Frank Henninger, and Pete Arons, all of whom had a positive influence on my writing.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, for their genuine interest in my poetry and essays.

*I stand up next to a mountain, and
 Chop it down with the edge of my hand.
 I stand up next to a mountain, and
 Chop it down with the edge of my hand.
 I pick up all the pieces and make an island,
 Might even raise a little sand.*

--JIMI HENDRIX

"Rita Dove's poems are often mysterious but they are not perplexing: they make so strong an appeal to our common humanity that they are to be enjoyed and wondered at rather than to be figured out," says *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Edition* (Ellmann and O'Clair 1692). The fact is Dove's poems can be "figured out" rather easily, provided that one approaches her work within a specific frame of reference. Dove's frame of reference, like that of another Pulitzer Prize Laureate poet, Yusef Komunyakaa, involves the integration and aesthetic instillation (Aubert 119) in her poetry of cultural material from both her African American and her European American sources. Having been born and raised in Ohio, Dove has strong ties to the Midwest. Upon graduating from Ohio's Miami University, Dove, on a Fulbright Scholarship, studied modern European literature at the University of Tübingen in Germany (Roth 293). Some of her later writing--the poem "At the German Writers Conference in Munich," for instance--invokes her experiences there. Komunyakaa's experiences with European culture are less direct, but no less intense. Growing up in--what was then "the heart of Ku Klux Klan activity" (Komunyakaa as qtd. by Gotera 217)--Bogalusa, Louisiana, 70 miles from New Orleans, and later serving in Vietnam as a correspondent and editor of *The Southern Cross*, Komunyakaa has been widely exposed to the French cultural aspects of those places.

Stressing the desire for African American poetry to be viewed not only inside but also outside of the African American canon--which is, as Michael S. Harper and Anthony Walton tell us, "often limited to those works that are identifiably 'black,' [those works] with black subject matter, themes, etc." (3)--Komunyakaa and Dove, through the use of multicultural images, address African Americans as well as European Americans. By communicating with their primary audience (other blacks) as well as their secondary audience (non-blacks), the African American poet approaches a broader appeal.

Where the poetry of a previous generation of African American poets (e.g. Angelou, Baraka, and Giovanni) communicates with its primary audience because it is steeped in African American speech, Komunyakaa's and Dove's poetry communicates to both primary and secondary audiences because there is less of an emphasis on African American speech and more of an emphasis on African American and European American images. Consequently, many of the images emphasized in Rita Dove's and Yusef Komunyakaa's poems belong to voodoo, that "extremely vast universe, an African religion indeed, but also a European religion: in a word, a syncretic religion that has blended together not only different African cults but also certain beliefs from European folklore" (Metraux 4).

More specifically, voodoo draws mainly from West-African and Roman Catholic theological and ritual traditions. It should be recognized, however, that "[a]lthough voodoo (originally *Vodoun* from the Creole French version of the Dahomey *Vodu*; also possibly etymologically related to the West African word for the

supernatural, *JuJu*)¹ is often said to be of West-African origin, the precise beginnings of what are now Voodoo beliefs are actually Caribbean":

Elements of Caribbean Voodoo influence are easily found among peoples who presently still practise Voodoo rituals; the Devego and Shango are examples. Elements native to the Yoruba religion of Nigeria, said to be one of the origin countries of syncretic, African religions, are found to be joined with elements that are alien. (Martin 69)

Moreover, its West-African and Roman Catholic influences date from the period of French colonization in Haiti, during which time slaves, formerly belonging to the Yoruba, Fon, Kongo, and other West-African tribes, settled in the Caribbean.

Presently, Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which, of course, Columbus claimed for Spain in 1492. The French occupied the western third of Hispaniola as a colony in 1677. By the Treaty of Ryswick, in 1697, Spain confirmed French occupation of its long established settlement in Hispaniola, "the most beautiful and fertile part of the West Indies and perhaps of the world," which became Saint Domingue² (Williams 81). It followed that in the closing decades of the eighteenth century Saint Domingue enjoyed economic success:

In the one year 1789 the exports of cotton and indigo, coffee, cacao, tobacco, hides, and *sugar* [italics mine] filled the holds of over four thousand ships. In France no fewer than five million of the

twenty-seven million citizens of the ancien regime depended economically on this trade. It was a staggering concentration of wealth, and it readily cast Saint Domingue as the jewel of the French empire and the most coveted colony of the age. (Davis 66).

In addition to Saint Domingue, France was in possession of Martinique, Gaudeloupe, St. Lucia, and Tobago--the most valuable West Indian territories, Cuba excepted (Williams 94). But it was Saint Domingue's slave force of almost half a million who generated two-thirds of France's overseas trade--"a productivity that easily surpassed that of the newly formed United States and actually outranked the total annual output of all the Spanish Indies combined" (Davis 66). Yet, nearly half a million African slaves were dominated by an aristocracy of only thirty thousand whites (Davis 66), and were apparently maltreated:

The worst hell on earth in 1789, Saint-Domingue was absorbing 40,000 slaves a year. . . .

Moreau de Saint-Mery cites as a typical case that of a sugar plantation in Leogane, begun in 1750 with 78 creole slaves--that is they were not fresh importations that died rapidly, but acclimated slaves. By 1787 the proprietor had purchased 255 other slaves, in addition to which 150 Negroes were born on the plantation during this interim. Notwithstanding this, the plantation contained only 203 Negroes in 1787. This represented a loss, in the thirty-seven years, of nearly four times the original stock. Of the 200 Negroes on his typical plantation,

Moreau de Saint-Mery stated that fifteen--seven and a half percent--must be reckoned as always in the hospital. (245)

The high levels of mortality and sickness point to the harsh treatment inflicted on the slaves. Even though their harsh treatment seems to be the primary cause of the only successful slave revolt in history, led by former slave coachmen Toussaint Louverture in 1791, the political "wranglings, conflicts, and discussions of the French Revolution" occasioned "the slaves themselves to take the initiative and settle the question of the superiority of Saint-Domingue" (Williams 246). In 1791, two years after the French Revolution, France, hard-pressed in Europe, was concerned more with rebuilding its government and less with Saint Domingue's unrest (Williams 251). Yet, preoccupied as France was, the slaves were not the only ones to take advantage of its situation.

By this time, Britain had lost thirteen colonies, some of which were sugar cane-producing: "One of the immediate and most catastrophic consequences of the American Revolution for the British West Indies was that it left them face to face with, and inferior to, their French rivals, once their economic dependence on North America was removed" (Williams 237). As a result, Britain looked not only to India but also to Jamaica, Antigua, Grenada, and Dominica for its sugar. India's cane sugar crop yields proved to be rich in quality and quantity, but these four British islands had experienced some overcropping. Planters in Saint Domingue had not yet exhausted its fertile soil. As European demand for cane sugar increased, the French planters in Saint-Domingue were thus able to undersell the British in the European market (Williams 239). For Britain, gaining control of Saint Domingue meant recapturing the

European sugar market. Meanwhile, the fact that "[t]he British planters in India promised that they could supply sufficient sugar 'without slavery or oppression of any kind whatever'" (Williams 244), gave British skeptics an economic reason to accept the abolition of the slave trade. On April 2, 1792, British Prime Minister William Pitt announced that the slave trade was disastrous to Great Britain's economic interests. Earlier, "[i]n 1787, Pitt had written to the British envoy in France about 'the idea of the two nations agreeing to discontinue the villainous traffic carried on in Africa'" (Williams 245). Despite this and other efforts by Pitt, "[t]he French Government complimented the British on their humanity, but regretted that it could not give up the slave trade . . . privately, the French Government attributed the British proposal to interested motives in no way connected with humanity and with a determination to run Saint Domingue" (Williams 245). Nevertheless, the slaves of Saint Domingue were aware of Pitt's efforts and began to align themselves with British humanism and abolitionism.

Regarding the slave trade, fundamental differences between France and Britain continued. In February, 1793, war was declared between the two countries. Soon after, British troops landed in Saint Domingue, thus confirming French suspicions about British interests there (Williams 250). Yet, there was a new element involved in this renewal of the earlier eighteenth-century struggle in the Caribbean between Britain and France:

That element was the slaves, by this time led by Toussaint Louverture.

A modern British historian has attempted to justify Pitt's policy by

saying that there was, to all appearances, little risk except from the slaves. This is typical of the British genius for understatement. It was the slaves who saved Saint-Domingue for France. As the slaves continued the war against the French planters and British troops, the French revolution, moving more and more to the left, decreed the total abolition of slavery in the French dominions, in 1794. 'Citizens,' cried [George Jacques] Danton, 'today the English are riddled! Pitt and his plots are done for!'"

The British were attempting to conquer Saint-Domingue and restore the *status quo* before 1789; every Negro and mulatto knew what that meant, slavery for the former, political and social inferiority for the latter. The French Government, which had in 1792, decreed political equality for the mulattoes, now, in 1794, decreed liberty for the slaves. (Williams 250).

Troops of ex-slaves, led by Toussaint Louverture, opposed the British troops. But, oddly, it was yellow fever that completed what Toussaint had begun. Many voodooists argue that the yellow fever was the result of a spell cast on the British (Mulira 36). (In June 1994, the Haitian voodoo high priestess, hoping to discourage an United States invasion of Haiti, echoed the alleged role voodoo had played in defeating the British, when she cast a spell on American troops pervading there (Ferguson 1).) In the years following British defeat, ex-slaves enjoyed liberty under Toussaint's rule.

Toussaint voiced his people's distrust of French Colonialism in a letter to France's Directory on November 5, 1797. The letter adamantly opposed any reestablishment of slavery by the French, citing Saint Domingue's willingness and ability to successfully resist any invasion. However, the Directory was insulted by its extreme, revolutionary tone, and further bothered by the idea of Toussaint, a Negro, ruling a French colony. In 1801, Toussaint sent Bonaparte, who had just seized power by his *coup d'état*, a copy of Saint Domingue's newly drawn up constitution (Williams 252). The constitution named Toussaint governor of what was still called the French colony of Saint Domingue, thereby giving him the right to nominate his successor (Williams 252). Bonaparte was incensed by San Domingue's step toward self-government. In December of 1801, two years before the Louisiana Purchase, Bonaparte, at the height of his power, set out to restore Saint Domingue to her dependence, and reinstate the slave trade and slavery:

[Bonaparte] . . . dispatched the largest expedition ever to have sailed from France. Its mission was to take control of the Mississippi, hem in the expanding United States, and reestablish the French empire in what had become British North America. En route to Louisiana, it was ordered to pass by Saint Domingue and quell the slave revolt. The first wave of the invading force consisted of twenty thousand veteran troops under Bonaparte's ablest officers commanded by his own brother-in-law, Leclerc. So vast was the flotilla of support vessels that when it arrived in [San Domingue], the leaders of the revolt momentarily despaired,

convinced that all of France had appeared to overwhelm them. (Davis 67)

Yet, within a year, Leclerc was dead, and, thus, never did reach Louisiana.

The French had perhaps not anticipated that Toussaint's troops would resist so vehemently: "of the thirty four thousand troops to land with [Leclerc], a mere two thousand remained in service" (Davis 67). However, before his death at the hands of the ex-slaves, Leclerc succeeded in capturing Toussaint Louverture:

Toussaint was captured by a treachery which he should have foreseen, treated like a criminal, and put on board a warship for France. On the deck of the ship he uttered his memorable prophecy: 'In overwhelming me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep.' He was imprisoned without trial in a prison high up in the French Alps, where the rigours of the climate and a semi-starvation diet soon had the inevitable effect. On April 27, 1803, he was found sitting by the fireplace, his hands resting on his knees, his head slightly bent, dead. According to one account, the rats had gnawed at his feet. His corpse was thrown into a common grave.

(Williams 253)

Following Toussaint's capture and Leclerc's death, the infamous Rochambeau assumed command, waging a war of extermination against the revolutionaries. Rochambeau's captured were reportedly "put to torch "or "chained to rocks and allowed to starve"

(Davis 67). The following is further testimony as to the brutality of Rochambeau's campaign:

The wife and children of one prominent rebel were drowned before his eyes while [Rochambeau's] French sailors nailed a pair of epaulettes into his naked shoulders. Fifteen hundred dogs were imported from Jamaica and taught to devour black prisoners in obscene public events housed in hastily built amphitheaters in [Haiti's] Port-au-Prince.

(Davis)

Still, French reinforcements arriving in San Domingue were persistently met by rebel forces. Toussaint's successors, Dessalines and Christophe, continued the struggle, "and yellow fever no more spared the French soldiers than it spared the British" (Williams 254). On January 1, 1804, Dessalines' secretary, standing at the very spot where Toussaint Louverture had been treacherously captured, read aloud "the declaration of independence of the new republic--the second in the New World³--which, to remove every vestige of a detested rule, took its ancient name of Haiti" (Williams).

Consequently, the fact that voodoo is currently undergoing a political renaissance in Haiti is linked to its obscure role in helping the revolutionary slaves of Saint Domingue defeat two of the finest armies of Europe. Today, many outlanders, especially Americans, regard Toussaint Louverture as the chieftain, the liberator, the champion of nationalism, and the victor of a vehement but valiant revolution; yet, in addition to this, many Haitians, especially voodooists, suggest that he was in part responsible for magically bringing about the scourge of yellow fever that, between

1794 and 1803, repulsed, or "voodooed," British and French invaders⁴ (French 4). In fact, on June 13, 1994, Haiti's de facto president, Emil Jonassaint, declared a state of emergency and appealed to voodoo gods to protect Haiti from outsiders, just as Toussaint's followers did against the British and the French nearly two centuries ago (Squitieri 4). William H. Gray III, President Clinton's administrator to Haiti, derided Jonassaint's speech partly because of its reference to voodoo (French 4). Yet, many Haitians said Gray's response betrayed a profound American ignorance of their culture (French 4). Besides, in light of such things as George Washington's supposed immunity to bullets at Braddock's defeat, the mythology surrounding Toussaint's alleged magical powers is not astonishing (Cunliffe 4). Nonetheless, since October 13, 1994, four months after Jonassaint's speech disturbed the Clinton administration, there has been, much to the dismay of many Haitians, an United States military presence in Haiti.

Furthermore, in Haiti today, Toussaint's prophetic words--"In overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of Liberty . . . it will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep"--are to live by, reminders of the Haitian's ongoing quest for liberty and, in consequence, interlaced with the fundamental voodoo belief in resurrection (Davis 217). That is, even though Toussaint's words may be interpreted in many ways, voodooists--and, in consequence, many Haitians--understand therein a phoenix-from-the-flame image.

Moreover, this voodoo interpretation of Toussaint's prophesy emerges as a controlling image in Dove's "Parsley." "Parsley" is one of the best examples of a

poem in which Dove uses voodoo images. The poem takes place in Haiti and the Dominican Republic during Rafael Trujillo's regime, when the Dominican Republic was a one-party state, and Trujillo was the state. Trujillo, from 1929 until his assassination on May 30, 1961, organized and established a tyranny which ranks among the most ruthless in history. He eventually came to control his country's sugar productions. Near the end of his career, his sugar interests were valued at \$150 million (Williams 464-6). On October 2, 1957, Trujillo--by way of redrawing a boundary between the Dominican Republic and Haiti set by the United States during its occupation of Hispaniola (1916-24)--ordered 15,000 to 20,000 Haitians killed because they could not properly pronounce the letter "r" in "perejil," the Spanish word for parsley (Dove, *Selected Poems* 136). (Thus, it would be difficult for Haitians, most of whom speak with a French accent, to accurately "roll" a Spanish "r.") The following is further testimony as to Trujillo's brash and irrational decision to have Haitians, by the thousands, quickly and quite meaninglessly massacred:

The irrational and impulsive elements in his [Trujillo's] character broke through to the surface . . . In this mad moment he gave the order to launch the famous massacres that would be forever associated with his name.

The terrible events of the thirty-six hours that began on the night of October 2 had the appearance of spontaneity, and every effort was made later to preserve this impression. Except for the timing, however, the details of the slaughter had surely been planned well in advance, as

a kind of military operation. The use of the Army and the perfect coordination of the massacres on a countrywide basis, with the details all fitting into a custom design, could not have been achieved by an impulsive outburst. (Crassweller 154).

It followed that most of the massacres took place in the boarder areas, where it was so overcrowded with undernourished Haitians that a severe health problem had developed (Crassweller 151). These were problems Trujillo and his wealthy regime sought not to solve through medical or economical aid. Instead, Trujillo waged a war of extermination to rid the area of disease:

In Santiago alone [Trujillo's] Army rounded up between one and two thousand Haitians, herded them into a courtyard formed by government buildings, and systematically decapitated them with machetes, this weapon being used whenever possible in preference to firearms in order to stimulate a spontaneous attack by an enraged Dominican peasantry. In Monte Cristi another large group of Haitians was marched at gunpoint to the end of the harbor pier, with arms bound, and simply pushed into deep water to drown. At Dajabon, on the banks of the Massacre, more thousands were cut down by machete and rifle as they sought the refuge of the old boundary line. Bodies clogged the river. Bodies were piled into obscure little valleys. Bodies lay in village streets and on country roads and in . . . fields. . . . Blood dripped from trucks that carried corpses to secluded ravines for disposal.

A crude test was adopted to probe the claim of Dominican nationality . . . Everyone was asked to say the Spanish word *perejil*, and those who pronounced it "pelegil" were damned as Haitians and cut down without further ado. Under military orders, the exterminations were carried out even on an individual basis, within the very bosoms of families. The case of a Captain Bisono was later widely recalled. On direct orders, and in his own home, he discharged his revolver into the body of his family's aged Haitian cook, who had been regarded for years as one of themselves. (Crassweller 154)

In the midst of the massacres, Trujillo kept his reputation as a shrewd international politician⁵, smiling as he boast, "While I was negotiating, out there they were going sha-sha-sha" (Trujillo as qtd. by Crassweller 155). "He intoned the syllables in imitation of the chopping sound of the machete cutting through a neck and made the cutting gesture with his hand" (Crassweller 155). Subsequent to the massacre on October 2, 1957, Trujillo offered a justification: "Haitians are foreigners in our land. They are dirty, rustlers of cattle, and practitioners of Voodoo. Their presence within the territory of the Dominican Republic cannot but lead to the deterioration of the living conditions of our citizens" (cited in Lawless 140). Such a bogus justification, compounded by his astonishing sexuality--his partiality for mulatto women--demonstrates Trujillo's color prejudice and racism.

In "Parsley," the Haitians speak of Trujillo's tyranny--"El General . . . he is all the world there is"--and Dove "laments the persecution of people who, because of their

ethnic backgrounds and speech habits, tend through no fault of their own to mutilate the sounds of a received or second language, or of a contrasting dialect of their own language" (Jones 154). The poem is divided into two sections. In the first section, "The Cane Fields," the Haitian fieldworkers say: "Out of the swamp the cane appears to haunt us, and we cut it down." As Dove uses them, the words "cane" and "appears" have double meanings: "cane" probably refers to sugar cane, but may allude to Trujillo's mother's walking cane, mentioned in the poem's second section; "appears" may refer to either the manner by which the cane comes into view, or the manner in which the cane seems to haunt. In a poem that exploits Trujillo's misuse of language, Dove's close attention to linguistics must not be overlooked. The cane appears to haunt the fieldworkers not only while they are at work in the fields, but also while they are asleep and dreaming: "The cane appears in our dreams, lashed by wind and streaming." Each time the cane appears to haunt them, they cut it down, and each time they cut it down, it appears again, "out of the swamp," to haunt them.

This image is a vehicle by which Toussaint's prophesy is conveyed. In other words, Dove's image of the cane rising "out of the swamp" suggests Toussaint's idea of "the tree of Liberty [springing] up again by its roots." Yet, every year, the Haitians harvest the cane for Trujillo. It seems bitterly ironic that, year after year, they symbolically cut down that which, according to Toussaint's prophesy, could liberate them. Unlike their ancestors of nearly two centuries ago, these fieldworkers do not rebel against their oppressor. They have become, in a sense, zombies made to obey Trujillo's commands. Alfred Metraux, a well known anthropologist who has

studied voodoo in Haiti, writes: "The zombi is a beast of burden, which his master exploits without mercy, made to work in the fields . . . [a] zombi's life is seen in terms which echo the harsh existence of a slave in the old colony of Santo Domingo. It is generally believed that certain drugs⁶ can induce such a profound state of lethargy as to be indistinguishable from death" (281-283). Dove describes an acquiescent or relatively helpless suffering--commonly, the zombi seems to be in a rather piteous state--on behalf of the fieldworkers. Consequently, she seemingly evokes in us readers a sense of sorrow felt for the maltreated fieldworkers. Whether we readers recognize the fieldworkers as zombies or not depends largely upon our knowledge of voodoo culture; whether we recognize the fieldworkers as sufferers, however, depends largely upon our knowledge of suffering. The latter knowledge is evidently the more universally recognized.

Section two of "Parsley," titled "The Palace," is replete with specific voodoo imagery as well:

It is fall when thoughts turn
to love and death; the general thinks
of his mother, how she died in the fall
and he planted her walking cane at the grave
and it flowered, each spring stolidly forming
four-star blossoms.

William Walsh, in an interview with Dove, asked her to discuss these lines, believing them to extend "a very mystical image that the reader must accept as a possibility,

almost mystical in its conceit" (152). Dove replied: "Magic realism stuff" (Dove as qtd. by Walsh 152). The following excerpt from Walsh's interview discusses these lines in light of magical realism.

W: Magical realism, exactly. You do that in several poems.

D: Well, I don't think about these aspects of my work as magical realism. To me, just looking at anything closely is pretty magical. I've had people point out passages they think as having elements of magical realism, and all I can think is: isn't reality magic? . . . In *Thomas and Beulah* there's a line in the poem "Magic" when Beulah's a child, sharpening knives on a grindstone, and she grinds so long that "the knives grew thin." Something growing and diminishing at the same time. As a child I was fascinated by paradoxes like that. (152-53)

Thus, Dove may be at first hesitant to ascribe "Parsley" as magic realism because she appears to regard magic and realism as syncretic. In other words, her assertion--"and, all I can think is: isn't reality magic"--suggests that magic and realism, two concepts we often think of as mutually opposed, are in fact coalescent, syncretic. According to Angel Flores, whose article had a great impact on scholars dealing with magic realism, Dove's assertion is likely a satisfactory theoretical definition of the term. Flores, for example, considers magic realism an "amalgamation of realism and fantasy" (Flores as qtd. by Chanady 19). Others, however, define the concept differently, emphasizing "two different perceptions of reality--the magical and

the rational" (Chanady 19). Yet, discussing magic realism in her poem "Magic," Dove mentions possibly another criterion for magic realism: "something growing and diminishing at the same time" (Walsh 153). Through the image of "a child, sharpening knives on a grindstone" who "grinds so long that 'the knives grew thin,'" Dove explains that magical [fantastical] and realistic [rational] actions can be syncretic. But, although these two actions, "sharpening" and "growing thin" may be simultaneous and, no doubt, realistic, it is difficult to see one as magical and the other as realistic, unless, of course, the actions are perceived by a child. A child, for instance, may go to the grindstone for the purpose of sharpening her knives. She may then discover that the "knives grew thin," without being able to rationalize or explain this. Thus, for the child, the unexplained often becomes the magical. Yet, as one critic suggests, Dove's sophisticated poems often demonstrate that this way of seeing is not restricted to children:

[Dove's] [p]oems often depict the collision of wish with reality, of the heart's desire with the dictates of the world. This collision is made tolerable by the working of the imagination, and the result is, for Dove, "magic," or the existence of an unexplainable occurrence." (Roth 294)

Interestingly enough, Dove's fascination with "[s]omething growing and diminishing at the same time" surfaces in "Parsley." That is, just as "the cane appears out of the swamp," the fieldworkers almost simultaneously "cut it down." Yet, it is difficult to see this image as a magically realistic one, unless we understand it as a vehicle by which Toussaint Louverture's prophesy is conveyed. Metaphorically, the

diminishing and growing cane may represent the diminishing and growing tree of Liberty⁷. Upon Toussaint's capture and, thereby, at the very point at which Toussaint's rule is diminishing, he utters his famous prophesy, declaring that "the trunk of the tree of Liberty . . . will spring up again by the roots" If, as has been suggested, Toussaint's prophesy is interlaced with the fundamental voodoo belief in resurrection, what then may be more magically realistic than a resurrection image, whereby death precedes the rising from the dead? Moreover, magic is inextricably mixed with the Voodoo religion (Metraux 266).

In voodoo, gravesides are places of tremendous magical energy. It is customary, when visiting the graveside, to offer some sort of memento to the dead; such mementos are thought to fend off evil spirits. Although Trujillo was not a voodooist, living as he did in the midst of it, in his private life he may have feared voodoo's black magic. Even so, in "Parsley," Dove suggests that Trujillo's mother was at least superstitious: she bakes "skull-shaped candies for the Day of the Dead," a holiday celebrated by the Voodoo Church (Farah 15). Placing "her walking cane at the grave," Trujillo hopes to protect his mother from evil spirits and, thereby, demonstrates his love and respect for her. Thus, Dove contrasts Trujillo's tyranny, exhibited in his public and political life, with his tenderness, exhibited in his private life⁸. Dove constructs a poem that both implores us to hate Trujillo, the terrible dictator, and entreats us to pity Trujillo, the delicate mama's boy. More precisely, whereas some poets would pleasantly and easily take to lampooning and caricaturing the dictator, Dove attempts to understand his conduct in terms of his aloneness⁹.

For Trujillo, his pet parrot--that someone who "calls out his name so like his mother's"--reminds him of his mother. The parrot occupies the room in the palace where his mother slept before she died. Dove imagines that Trujillo's mother comforted him deeply, and that an already lonely man became lonelier after his mother's death. He no longer had anyone to talk to. More importantly, however, "[t]he parrot imitating spring in the palace, its feathers parsley green," may symbolize Trujillo's oppression of the Haitian fieldworkers: "Like a parrot imitating spring, we [fieldworkers] lie down screaming." Trujillo has imported the parrot from Australia in an ivory cage. Thus, the parrot--like the emperor's nightingale in Hans Christian Andersen's story, whose song sounds better among the trees than behind the palace walls--has been displaced from its natural setting. Likewise, the fieldworkers, have been displaced, having been brought to Hispaniola from Africa in the slave trade. Furthermore, Dove suggests that the parrot sits, fettered or with its wings clipped, upon a brass ring in a room with a view. For the parrot, freedom lies just outside the palace walls. The parrot must sit inside the palace, mechanically imitating, without fully understanding, Trujillo's words. Trujillo concludes that because the parrot "can roll an R" and the fieldworkers cannot, the parrot is the more intelligent being. Trujillo's logic is absurd. Yet, is it not true that racism stems from such absurdities as this? Dove seems to say that it's an injustice for an individual to be "all the world there is"; tyranny's hard on the Haitians, but it's also hard on the dictator.

Moreover, "[a]s a theme in verse, Dove seems to say, indignation at social injustice has a place but one that should not be too prominent; *racial* indignation must

be even more discreet. Indignation tends to destroy art itself, she apparently believes, especially black art; a confrontation with racism appears to open the world but often only opens a void that gapes deceitfully between the poet and her possession of the wide world" (Rampersad 56).

Furthermore, racism, throughout history, has accompanied tyranny. Trujillo's ruthless killing of the Haitians mirrors General Maximilian Hernandez Martinez's killing of the El Salvadorians¹⁰ or, in a broader sense, Hitler's killing of the Jews. Thus, it is important to approach "Parsley" within its specific frame of reference, voodooistic Haiti, because voodoo evolved out of a need to transcend racism and tyranny. In Haiti "[t]he slaves, imported from Africa in the eighteenth century, were baptized, forced to go to church, but they received no religious education. Thus they remained even more attached [to voodoo] since they were thus able to guard some hope and, in spite of the reality, to give their lives some meaning, thanks to certain values that these beliefs preserved. The life of the slaves was horrible, abominable-- and vaudou [voodoo] brought to them which brings to Haiti's poor today: the grounds for hope, for confidence, and above all, a way of distracting oneself, of escaping from reality" (as qtd. by Bing 28-29). Voodoo has almost inevitably come to be associated with the endless struggle of the Haitian people against their oppressed condition.

"Voodoo," says Reginald Martin, discussing hoodoo as a literary method in Ishmael Reed's literature, "thrives because of its syncretic flexibility; its ability to take anything, even ostensibly negative influences, and transfigure them into that which helps" (Martin 71). In "Parsley" it is this concept of syncretism that Dove

effectively uses to positive ends. It's Dove's poetic vision, if you will, to not merely straddle, but, instead, to remove the line of demarcation between the black community and what has traditionally been thought of as the academy, the Euro-American Literary Establishment (Harper and Walton 3). Such a vision corresponds with contemporary ideas about multiculturalism. Dove envisions a combination, reconciliation, and coalescence of what has been, for far too long now, often thought of as the mutually opposed beliefs, principles, or practices of African and European Americans (Harper and Walton 272), into a new, syncretic whole typically marked by internal inconsistencies. It is not really an unrealistic vision in as far as voodooists are concerned, since voodoo--presently the favorite religion of the Haitians (Corngold 210)--is a syncretic religion which has blended together African and European religions, beliefs, principles, practices, etc. (Metraux 4). Since, as Reginald Martin has implied, voodoo "helps" (Martin 71) its people cope with their difficulties, outsiders should attempt to see it not as an eccentricity or aberration, but, instead, as an uplifting syncretic religion. Moreover, Dove delivers her syncretic vision, multiculturalism, via writing about a syncretic religion, voodoo.

Dove shares this poetic vision with Yusef Komunyakaa. Komunyakaa believes in what he calls a "unified vision" (Komunyakaa as qtd. by Aubert 119), a poetic vision endowed with the language and images of not only African American but European American experience as well. Komunyakaa would like to be considered part of the American literary canon, just so long as it's not at the expense of surrendering either his African American or his European cultural identity. Moreover, he pursues a

unified vision through his bid for mainstream literary status, and in both the excellence and prolificacy of his poetic output¹¹. The fact that Dove's and Komunyakaa's poems convey this shared poetic vision does not mean that their poems are alike in all other respects. Perhaps the most noticeable difference can be ascribed to regionalism: whereas Dove's poems often evoke her native Ohio's iron and steel region, Komunyakaa's often evoke his native Louisiana's creole and bayou region. Nonetheless, many of Komunyakaa's images, like Dove's, refer to voodoo.

Much of Komunyakaa's writing draws from his childhood in Bogalusa, Louisiana, which was not only a center of Klan activity and later a focus of Civil Rights efforts, but also a hub of voodoo energy. Bogalusa lies only thirty miles north of New Orleans, the birthplace of voodoo in North America (Mulira 35). The Louisiana colony received newcomer slaves from Africa as well as experienced slaves from Saint Domingue, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. "All three colonies," writes Jessie Gaston Mulira, "were known as hotbeds of voodooism" (35). In 1791, as a result of the Haitian Revolution, hundreds of Haitian refugees settled in and around New Orleans. The Louisiana colony, especially New Orleans, appealed to them--many of whom were voodoo practitioners and some of whom were voodoo cult leaders --because of its French influence. In addition, the "renowned and earliest voodoo leaders in New Orleans came either directly from Africa or by way of the West Indies" (Mulira 35).

After the massive immigration of African and West Indian slaves to the Louisiana colony, slave traders, contrary to popular belief, made no attempt to separate

the African slaves from the West Indian slaves. Thus, within the slave community, an acculturation occurred between African and West Indian slaves; the West Indians having had, in most instances, a heavier influence of Catholicism and French culture. Among slave communities, voodoo thrived during this acculturation process, swallowing up African, West Indian, and French custom, African and Catholic religions, alike. Writing about such a remarkable blending of African and European cultures during the early stages of slavery in America, Mulira explains:

The most dominant and intact African survival in the black diaspora has proved to be the religion of voodoo. The survival of African religious and magical systems is linked to their importance in everyday life. In addition, their ability to accommodate and be associated with various facets of other established religions strengthened their chances of survival. Ancient deities in the African pantheon were often given Catholic saints' names. The most tenacious African religious retentions in the United States are found where Catholicism has been particularly strong, including New Orleans. By appealing to traditional deities and mystical forces, the slaves were able to keep alive their link with Africa. (36)

Throughout the earlier half of the nineteenth century, many voodoo priests and root doctors concerned themselves with identifying, preaching, and legitimizing the connections between African deities and Catholic saints or the African concept of good and evil and the Catholic concept of heaven and hell. Some such root doctors,

however, propagandized voodoo's divination, manipulation, and especially herbalism, to the point where American voodooism has been given a magical rather than a religious appearance. Hence, many slaveowners have had the impression that voodoo was not a religious system but a magical system. These slaveowners in particular came to fear voodoo magic and made several attempts to suppress it. "These antivoodooists," writes Mulira, "managed to limit the number of voodoo and hoodoo objects in the slaves' cabins" (36).

"Hoodoo" is misdefined by an otherwise candid observer of American voodoo, Zora Neale Hurston. Hoodoo is not, as Ms. Hurston says in *Mules and Men*, the whites' pronunciation of the word "voodoo"; instead, hoodoo is the negative component of voodoo or--as opposed to voodoo's white magic--voodoo's black magic. (Hurston may be attempting, however, to account for an etymological phenomenon by which, since the turn of the century, most Americans have come to use the words 'voodoo' and 'hoodoo' interchangeably.) The function of magic in voodoo is psychological--magic helped the slaves to deal with their "daily situations, to win the affections of the one's they desired, to cause harm to their enemies, and to feel protected from harm themselves" (Mulira 36).

During the Civil War, in the Lower Mississippi Valley, many slave revolts were fueled by voodoo priests and followers who believed that supernatural forces, sometimes in the form of their ancestors, were aiding the struggle for freedom. After the Civil War, there were voodooists who believed that voodoo had worked to emancipate the slaves, as it had worked in the Haitian Revolution. Furthermore, after

the abolition of slavery, many antivoodooists of the Lower Mississippi Valley region, which includes Bogalusa, worked from within the Klan to roust voodooists from this region. It is important to note that, especially in America during the period between 1920 and 1935, voodoo did not discriminate against color or race when welcoming new members into its church. Nevertheless, this is not to say that a prospective member was granted membership in the church without any investigation into his background and qualifications. Furthermore, prospective members of the Voodoo Church underwent a rigorous initiation process (Mulira 50). Nonetheless, it is from this background that we must approach some of Yusef Komunyakaa's poems; to do otherwise would be to ignore the significance of the history evoked in his poetry.

In many of his poems, most noticeably "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival," Komunyakaa uses voodoo imagery to promulgate his "unified vision." "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival" is a complex interweaving of memories and projections that tells the story of a ceremonial stirring up of faith, voodoo style. The first stanza of the poem is encrusted with hoodoo images:

your blank mouth
face behind the mask
talking in tongues
something tearing
feathers from a crow
that screams
from the furnace

the black candle
 in a skull
 sweet pain of meat (81)

These images seem to diverge, almost as if they were being described by someone who is either observing or involved in a voodoo dance. Since dancing is so closely related to the worship of the *loa* [spirits], voodoo has often been regarded as one of the 'danced religions.' (Perhaps Robert Hayden's poem "A Ballad of Remembrance" (1962), in which the speaker is "released from the hoodoo of that dance . . . among metaphorical doors," "mazurka dolls," "Quadroon mermaids," "Afro angels, black saints . . .," inspired Komunyakaa's poem, not so much in rhythm and form as in the syncretic arrangement of euphony and image.) There are many different voodoo dances, each with its own purpose. The dances all thrive upon improvisation. In fact, dancers are sometimes praised for their virtuosity in improvisation. Similar to many African dances, the true art of the voodoo dance is expressed more in the shoulders and hips than in the play of the feet. It is above all in *feints*--such improvisations which are permitted whenever the *manman* [drum], beaten with redoubled energy, introduces a break, like an off-beat, into the orchestra rhythm--that a dancer's virtuosity is revealed. Such breaks, called *casses*, interrupt the flow of the dance and throw people into a state of paroxysm felicitous to 'attacks' of *loa*" (Metraux 189). Thus, it is not unusual for voodoo dancers to speak in tongues:

Spurred on by the god within him, the devotee who a few moments earlier was dancing without gusto, throws himself into a series of

brilliant improvisations and shows a suppleness, a grace and imagination which often did not seem possible. The audience is not taken in: it is to the *loa* and not to the *loa's* servant that their admiration goes out.

(Metraux 189).

It is at this point of "possession" when dancers speak incomprehensibly.

Moreover, in the first stanza, Komunyakaa's speaker vividly represents the tremendous energy, ritual twirling, and loving interaction between voodoo dancers; but, at the same time, seems to suggest an ambivalence in the stanza's last oxymoronic line: "the sweet pain of meat." On the one hand, it is as if Komunyakaa is praising the "Revival" for allowing the dancers to be carried away by the supernatural powers music and rhythm. On the other hand, it seems as if he is apprehensive of the Revival's allowing for animal sacrifice: "a crow that screams from the furnace." It is possible that from the speaker's point of view, which is that of a child, sweet-tasting meat sours with the idea that an animal has been killed. It is difficult to know, however, whether Komunyakaa approves or disapproves of voodoo, in particular its ceremonies. He may approve of voodoo because it preserves and promotes, to a large extent, African religious custom and practice, especially in its sacred and ritual dances. Still, Komunyakaa may disapprove of those instances in which voodoo fosters unrefined habits such as animal sacrifice, zombiism, or "talking in tongues."

Regardless, the voodoo dance is accompanied by drum and sometimes music and song. Songs are in the form of a chant not unlike the three four-line-stanzas in "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival." The first of these chants appears, offset, between the

first and second stanzas:

let's pour the river's rainbow
 into our stone water jars
 bad luck isn't red flowers
 crushed under jackboots

The chanting, itself, suggests a ritual--and therefore communal--element. It is possible that this chant and the ones that follow allude to the voodoo myth of the Serpent and the Rainbow.

It is said that, in the beginning, there was only Damballah the Serpent and Ayida Wedo the Rainbow. The reservoir of all spiritual wisdom, Damballah, lay dormant in the earth, "holding it in place that it might not fall into the abysmal sea" (Davis 213). The following tells the story of the voodoo creation myth and may be readily applied to the poem.

In time, the Serpent began to move . . . [rising] slowly into a great spiral that enveloped the Universe. In the heavens, it released stars . . . on earth, it brought forth Creation, winding its way through the molten slopes to carve rivers, which like veins became the channels through which flowed the essence of all life.

Within its layered skin, the Serpent retained the spring of eternal life, and from its zenith it let go the waters that filled the rivers upon which the people would nurse. As the water struck the earth, the Rainbow arose, and the serpent took her as his wife. . . . In time

their fusion gave birth to the spirit that animates the blood. Women learned to filter this divine substance through their breasts to produce milk, just as men passed it through their testes to create semen. The Serpent and the Rainbow instructed women to remember these blessings once a month, and they taught men to damn the flow so that the belly might swell and bring forth new life. Then as a final gift they taught people to partake of the blood as a sacrament, that they might become the spirit and embrace the wisdom of the Serpent. (Davis 213-14)

Even though this creation story is taken from the voodoo of Haiti, remnants of it can be seen in Komunyakaa's retelling of an American hoodoo revival: the bluesy chants tell of a process by which "the river's rainbow" is poured into jars and, then, poured out of those same jars as "starlight." This process may serve the ritualists to venerate the union between the Serpent, who carved the rivers and released the stars, and the Rainbow.

The significance of the chants goes beyond that of merely retelling the voodoo creation myth. The chants imply that the hoodoo revival's ritual dancing, music, and singing serve not only to revive one's faith in his religion, but also to remind him that there is pain and suffering in the world: "pain isn't just red flowers crushed under jackboots." This lyric seems to express that, although the red flowers crushed under dancing feet may symbolize the pain of an oppressed group, held prostrate under the boots of their oppressor, pain exists in far many other forms. In this sense, the blacks of Bogalusa in the 1950's could represent an oppressed group while the Klan of

Bogalusa in the 1950's could be an oppressor. Yet, implicit in the poem is a common humanity, linked with a common pain--like that shared by the fieldworkers and Trujillo, in Dove's "Parsley." Ironically, "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival," is not only, as its title may indicate, a poem about the way in which a unique group of American people cope with their pain; it is also a poem recognizing that all people experience some kind of pain. Pain is, as Komunyakaa subtly indicates in the poem, neither "my story" nor "your story" but, "our story." As the poem progresses, the speaker gradually realizes this and, thereby, evolves or matures, becoming--unlike Trujillo in Dove's poem--less individualized, less ego-centric.

There are many images in the poem--such as "a crippled animal dragging a steel trap across the desert sand," "rotten fruit on the trees," "the wingspan of a hawk at the edge of a coyote's cry," "the dust wings of ghost dance vision," "the cup blood," "the madhouse," "the brooklyn bridge," and particularly "the river's rainbow"¹²--that are virtually uncategorical. Such images, one and all, could belong not only to voodoo but also to African, Native American, Hebrew, and/or Christian cultures as well. Moreover, "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival" creates a socio-historical context and experience that at first glance seems to be uniquely African American; but, a closer look reveals a socio-historical context and experience common to all.

In conclusion, Yusef Komunyakaa's "Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival," like Rita Dove's "Parsley," seeks to be a multi-audience, "multi-voiced" (Harper 3) poem that seems to beg not to be classified as a poem pertaining to the African American experience alone. In other words, in "Parsley" as well as "Blues Chant Hoodoo

Revival," one finds, instead of an obsession with race, an eagerness to transcend black cultural nationalism in the name of a more inclusive sensibility (Rampersad 53). On the surface, both Komunyakaa and Dove supply us with poems in which images vividly portray voodooism and its socio-history. Because voodoo is both a conglomeration of African and European cultures as well as the religious system of an oppressed people of mixed race, Dove and Komunyakaa apparently believe it to be a fitting foundation on which they can build poems that call out for not simply justice for blacks but justice for all. Beneath the surface, then, these images function, sagaciously no less, as images of the multiculture.

NOTES

1. Although Reginald Martin points to its relation to the West African word for the supernatural *JuJu*, the true etymology of the word "voodoo" is debatable. "Some people, in their anxiety to whitewash the Voodoo cults, saw it as a corruption of 'Vaudois' (the name of a sect founded in the twelfth century by Father Valdesius), but which had finally become a term applied vaguely to heretics and sorcerers" (Metraux 27). Yet, "in Dahomey and Togo [Africa], among tribes belonging to the Fon language-group, a "Voodoo" is a 'god', a 'spirit', a 'sacred object', in short, all those things which the European understands by the word 'fetish'" (Metraux 27). Furthermore, the words "voodoo" and "juju" may be regarded as the act of "putting bad medicine," or casting a spell on someone by means of "the fetish or *juju* potions and designs" (Mulira 39).

2. Saint Domingue is sometimes hyphenated and, thereby, appears as Saint-Domingue. Wade Davis chooses Saint Domingue whereas Eric Williams uses the hyphenated form. Furthermore, Saint Domingue should not be confused with the Dominican Republic's Capital Santo Domingo.

3. Ironically, the United States would lead the next invasion of Haiti. Following a period of political violence, the United States occupied Haiti from 1916 to 1924.

4. Although Ralph Corngold's biography of Toussaint Louverture may be regarded by some historians as superseded, since it was published in 1965, it nonetheless provides an interesting look into Toussaint's Catholicism. According to Corngold, Toussaint, before the conflict with Leclerc, "wrote to the ecclesiastical authorities in Paris asking that more [Catholic] priests be sent [to San Domingue]" (210). "Toussaint's request for more priests," Corngold explains, "was part of his campaign to destroy the voodoo cult and establish the Catholic religion as the State religion [of San Domingue] (210). Corngold's explanation is misleading. What he considers "the voodoo cult" was actually the earliest slaves practicing their African religions (Corngold 39). At this time, voodoo, as we know it today, had not yet meshed with Catholicism. Corngold tells of Toussaint's orders not only to have pagan alters, drums, and other objects confiscated but also to arrest voodoo priests, priestesses, and worshippers: "The worshippers, if caught, were soundly caned" (210). Lack of sources prevents us from knowing whether Toussaint, during the British and French invasions, remained true to Catholicism or converted to a then developing conglomeration of Catholicism and African religion, voodoo.

5. Eric Williams explains how Trujillo, in the midst of such despotism, was able to maintain an international rapport:

The United States watched and condoned all this without batting

an eyelid. For, as Franklin D. Roosevelt put it, 'He may be an S.O.B., but he is our S.O.B.' What impressed the United States was Trujillo's repayment of the entire foreign debt, as a result of which the Dominican Republic and the United States signed a treaty on September 24, 1940 ending United States administration of the Dominican customs under the 1924 Convention. The Dominican Congress voted Trujillo the title 'restorer' of Financial Independence'. (465)

At the same time Trujillo was in league with the United States, he was supporting such dictators as Somoza in Nicaragua as well as "seeking to improve his relations with countries behind the Iron Curtain, and even a temporary understanding with Castro" (Williams 466).

6. One such drug is tetrodotoxin, a potent neurotoxin found in puffer fish or blowfish and various other animals, which "blocks the conduction of nerve signals by completely stopping the movement of sodium ions into cells" (Davis 337).

7. The flower image in "Parsley" is strikingly similar to the one in *IV*, John Greenleaf Whittier's poem praising Toussaint Louverture. Nonetheless, it is difficult to estimate whether Dove was aware of the parallels between the flower image in her lines, "her cane flowered, each spring stolidly forming *four-star blossoms* [italics mine]," and Whittier's in his lines, "[t]he rhexias dark, and cassia tall, [a]nd proudly rising over all, [t]he kingly palm's imperial stem, [c]rowned with its leafy diadem, [*s*]tar-like [italics mine] . . ." (Toussaint Louverture 358).

8. Crassweller, in his biography of Trujillo, provides the following anecdote about Trujillo's "softer side":

(Many years later [that is, many years after the massacres], when Trujillo had not been softened but hardened by time and struggle, he was about to leave his residence early one evening, dressed in full uniform and wearing his decorations, for a formal reception. His granddaughter, Merciditas, the child of Ramfis, stopped him near the door and told him with a little girl's candor that she didn't want to take her bath, but that she wouldn't mind it if he would give her the bath himself. He turned around, gently took the child by the hand, led her to the tub, removed his glittering jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and bathed her. (155)

9. In the interview with William Walsh, Dove, to some extent, acknowledges this theory: "In 'Parsley,' I wanted to get inside of this dictator's head; again it's the technique used in 'Agosta the Winged Man and Rasha the Black Dove,' where the reader is privy to the character's thoughts, which follow a series of associations sparked by events both inside and outside the mind" (153).

10 . "General Maximilian Hernandez Martinez, the theosophical despot of El Salvador who had thirty thousand peasants exterminated in a savage orgy of killing, invented a pendulum to discover whether food was poisoned and had the street lamps covered with red paper to combat an epidemic of scarlet fever"--in his 1982 Nobel address, Gabriel Garcia Marquez calls this "madness" (Marquez 208).

11 . Mr. Komunyakaa has published *Copacetic* (1984); *I Apologize for the Eyes in My Head* (1986), winner of the San Francisco Poetry Center Award; *Dien Cai Dau* (1988) and *Magic City* (1992); and *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems* (1993), winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

12 . Even though rainbows appear as religious symbols in Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and other world religions (Eliade 204), they have a pronounced spiritual significance in voodoo: *loa* are said to dwell in rainbows (Crassweller 150). (Interestingly, Australian Aborigine, regard the Rainbow Snake, as perhaps the most important natural-deity, and, according to some tribes, the Rainbow Snake "can use the rainbow as a vehicle in which to travel great distances through the sky" (Eliade 205). Since 1986, Komunyakaa has been making annual visits to Australia where he continues to take an interest in the Aborigine (Goter 216).)

WORKS CITED

- Aubert, Alvin. "Yusef Komunyakaa: The Unified Vision--Canonization and Humanity." *African American Review*, Spring 1993.
- Barreca, Regina. "Writing as Voodoo: Sorcery, Hysteria, and Art." *Death and Representation*. Ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993.
- Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Corngold, Ralph. *Citizen Toussaint*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1965.
- Costello, Bonnie. "Scars and Wings: Rita Dove's *Grace Notes*." *Callaloo*, Spring 1991.
- Crassweller, Robert D. *Trujillo: The Life and Times of the Caribbean Dictator*. New York: Macmillan, 1966.
- Cunliffe, Marcus. *George Washington: Man and Monument*. New York: Mentor, 1982.
- Davis, Wade. *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. New York: Warner, 1985.
- Deren, Maya. *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti*. New York: McPherson, 1953.
- Dove, Rita. *Selected Poems*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- Grace Notes*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989.
- Ellmann, Richard and Robert O'Clair, Ed. *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Ed*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988.

- Farah, Douglas. "Haitian Crisis Chills Holiday Celebrations." *Washington Post*. 2 Nov. 1993, sec. A: 15
- Ferguson, Hayes. "Under Voodoo's Spell." *Times-Picayune*. 29 Aug. 1994, sec. A: 1
- French, Howard W. "Is Voodoo the Weapon to Repel Invaders?" *New York Times*. 24 June 1994, sec. A: 4
- Georgoudaki, Ekaterini. "Rita Dove: Crossing Boundaries." *Callaloo*, Spring 1991.
- Gotera, Vincente F. "Lines of Tempered Steel": An Interview with Yusef Komunyakaa." *Callaloo*, Spring 1990.
- Harper, Michael S. and Anthony Walton, Ed. *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep: An Anthology of Poetry by African Americans Since 1945*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994.
- Harris, Peter. "Four Salvagers Salvaging: New Work by Voigt, Olds Dove, and McHugh." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Spring 1988.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1935.
- Jones, Kirkland C. "Folk Idiom in the Literary Expression of Two African American Authors: Rita Dove and Yusef Komunyakaa." *Language and Literature in the African American Imagination*. Ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay. Greenwood: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Komunyakaa, Yusef. *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems*. Hanover: Wesleyan Press, 1993.
- Magic City*. Hanover: Wesleyan Press, 1992.
- Lawless, Robert. *Haiti's Bad Press*. Rochester: Schenkman, 1992.

- Major, Clarence. *The Dark and the Feeling: Black American Writers and Their Work*. New York: Joseph Okpaku Publishing, 1974.
- McDowell, Robert. "The Assembling Vision of Rita Dove." *Callaloo*, Winter 1986.
- McGuirk, Bernard and Richard Cardwell, Ed. *Gabriel Garcia Marquez*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Metraux, Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.
- Mulira, Jessie Gaston. "The Case of Voodoo in New Orleans." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Ed. Joseph Holloway. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Rampersad, Arnold. "The Poems of Rita Dove." *Callaloo*, Winter 1986.
- Reed, Ishmael. *Collected and New Poems*. New York: Athenum, 1988.
- Riguad, Milo. *Secrets of Voodoo*. New York: Arco, 1969.
- Roth, John K, ed. *American Diversity, American Identity*. New York: Henry Holt, 1995.
- Schneider, Steven. "Coming Home: An Interview with Rita Dove." *The Iowa Review*, Fall 1989.
- Squitieri, Tom. "In Haiti, A Spirited Defense." *USA Today*. 14 June 1994, sec. A: 4
- Toussaint Louverture. *Toussaint Louverture: A Biography and Autobiography*. Boston: James Redpath, 1863.
- Waller, Gary. "I and Ideology: Demystifying the Self of Contemporary Poetry." *Denver Quarterly*. Autumn 1983.
- Walsh, William. "Isn't Reality Magic?: An Interview with Rita Dove." *The Kenyon Review*, Summer 1994.

Waniek, Marilyn Nelson and Rita Dove. "A Black Rainbow: Modern Afro-American Poetry." *Poetry After Modernism*. Ed. Robert McDowell. Three Oaks Farm, Brownsville, OR: Story Line Press, 1990.

Williams, Eric. *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean*. New York: Vintage, 1970.